

# Sowing the Seeds of Praxis: Incorporating Youth Development Principles in a Library Teen Employment Program

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## ABSTRACT

The article summarizes the tradition of teen services in public libraries and discusses the more recent incorporation of youth development principles and practices into those services, with the Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development project being singled out as a major contributor to current thinking about this issue. The Free Library of Philadelphia's LEAP program, with its after-school employment of Teen Leadership Assistants, is presented as a normative case study in the intentional design and implementation of a teen job program based on youth development principles. Based on the Free Library experience, the author suggests that public libraries can supplement the developmental value of schooling by considering youth development an integral aspect of any jobs in which teens are employed and that teen job programs be considered an integral component of teen library services.

It is 9:00 on a Saturday morning in April. More than fifty teenagers are streaming into the Central Library of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Jincy and Meghan left their homes in the far northeast section of the city nearly two hours ago, commuting by bus and train to reach the library. Teddy has come from South Philadelphia, giving up practice for an upcoming table tennis tournament. Zoey bounces in from her mother's nearby apartment, full of energy that annoys some of her sleepier colleagues. Johanna drags in a little late; she admits that she is not a morning person. Jasmine carries a paperback copy of *Twilight* and a notebook in which she writes poetry. Gennady clowns and talks with anybody who will engage with him about politics, school, music, or movies. Eric hitches up

his pants, shuts down his iPod, and asks where the Door Prize Committee is meeting.

These teens are employed by the Free Library as Teen Leadership Assistants (TLAs). They work eight to ten hours a week in their neighborhood libraries with LEAP, an after-school program designed to provide educational and cultural enrichment to children and teens. They are also paid to participate in training sessions on Saturday mornings as well as to plan and implement an annual Youth Empowerment Summit. That is their project for today.

The TLAs of the Free Library of Philadelphia represent a new way of thinking about young adult services and teen employment in public libraries. The Free Library has designed a model teen employment program based on principles of youth development. As the teens themselves will tell you, "It's more than just a job."

### THE TRADITION OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE TO TEENS

Library service to young adults in public libraries is generally thought to have begun with the appointment of Mabel Williams as the Head of the School Work Department of New York Public Library (NYPL) in 1920 (Braverman, 1979). However, it is her successor, Amelia Munson, who first wrote about this specialization. *An Ample Field: Books and Young People* (1950) takes its title from a quote by Chaucer: "I have, God knows, an ample field to plow and feeble oxen." In both the subtitle of her book and in its forward, Munson makes it clear that young adult librarians are indeed working in the field of young people's reading. While Munson wrote the first handbook for young adult librarians, one that clearly focused on the library's mission in promoting books and reading, her influence was not as enduring as that of Margaret Alexander Edwards.

Edwards, whose career spanned several decades at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, reinforced the idea that library service to teens was all about reading. Early in that career, she formulated a philosophy of work with young adults that she claimed was as simple as ABC: "(A) a sympathetic understanding of all adolescents; (B) firsthand knowledge of all the books that would interest them; and (C) mastery of the technique of getting these books into the hands of adolescents" (Edwards, 2002, p. 16). She believed passionately that books could change young lives for the better and worked tirelessly to instill this belief in the librarians who worked for her.

Neither Mabel Williams nor Amelia Munson nor Margaret Edwards used the language of youth development in their rationale for young adult library services. However, some of Margaret Edwards' writings demonstrate an understanding that some of the developmental needs of adolescence could be met by reading the right kind of books. She had tended to downplay the value of "teenage novels," a genre in its infancy during

her career. However, in her grudging later acceptance of the possible value of these new contributions to young adult literature, she foreshadows some of the arguments that would be made fifty years later for incorporating principles of youth development into teen library services. She acknowledges that teen novels may lead apathetic readers to love reading and perhaps even stimulate them to read more worthwhile adult novels. She also finds that these books are likely “to satisfy some of the adolescent’s emotional and psychological needs; to throw light on the problems of adolescence; to explore the teenager’s relationship to his community” (Edwards, 2002, p. 58).

Over the years since Margaret Edwards formulated and documented a framework for library services to teens, many young adult librarians have accepted the responsibility to satisfy their young patron’s emotional and psychological needs and to help them explore their relationship to their community. However, they have tended to limit their strategies to reading promotion, primarily through book talks, and some forms of programming. Reading remained the focus of their work. It wasn’t until the turn of the twenty-first century that a new term began to assume good currency in the professional literature and associations devoted to library service to young adults: youth development.

Since the end of the twentieth century, the professional rhetoric about library service to young adults has been infused with the language of youth development. It is reflected in the approach advocated by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) in *New Directions for Library Service to Young Adults* (Jones, 2002) and in the YALSA document, *Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth* (2003). The most visible manifestation of youth development principles in public libraries is the emphasis put on youth participation through mechanisms such as youth advisory boards. Most library youth participation programs have been aimed primarily at acquiring information from teens about the books, popular music, and programs they wanted at their libraries. The desired outcomes were more relevant collections, programs, and services. Only gradually have libraries come to understand that teens who are active participants as planners and advisors in these programs also receive some desired developmental outcomes.

## WHAT IS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

In its most basic sense, youth development is a stage in human development that occurs during the second decade of life. It is the process that all young people go through as they move from childhood to adulthood. More normatively, the term is sometimes applied to a particular asset-based approach to working with teens (Yohalem & Pittman, 2003). This approach sees teens as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be solved. Psychologists, sociologists, educators, and social workers who

specialize in working with young people have come to a consensus that a combination of supports and opportunities can help teens make that transition effectively. Some youth development organizations focus on providing supports for the most vulnerable teens, those most at risk of failing to acquire the requisite developmental outcomes. Currently, however, youth advocates are more likely to maintain that all teens need to be nurtured through a web of community supports. Nicole Yohalem and Karen Pittman (2003, pp. 9–11), from the Forum for Youth Investment, sum up the key premises of the youth development movement in a handful of “bumper sticker” phrases:

- Problem-free isn’t fully prepared.
- Fully prepared isn’t fully engaged.
- Academic competence, while critical, isn’t enough.
- Competence itself, while critical, isn’t enough.
- Services alone aren’t enough.
- Programs alone aren’t enough.

Community-based organizations and institutions that understand and base their services to teens on this set of premises aim to help teens achieve positive developmental outcomes. Different leaders in the youth development field may define those desirable outcomes differently. Perhaps the most well known are the Forty Developmental Assets identified by the scholars at the Search Institute (2004), a Minneapolis-based non-profit research organization. They characterized the assets as the building blocks of development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. They divided the forty assets into eight categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identities. In today’s complex society, providing the supports and opportunities any teen would need in order to achieve all forty assets is a job beyond the reach of even the most capable parents. It truly takes a village, or at least a network of community agencies and institutions, to do the job. Teachers, social workers, religious leaders, nurses, recreation workers, and more all play a role. Increasingly, librarians in schools and public libraries see themselves as part of this web of support as well.

### THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS PARTNERS IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The initiative that established youth development as a significant principle underlying good practice in young adult library services was the Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development Project (PLPYD). PLPYD was funded by the Wallace Foundation in an effort to “support the development of innovative models for public library systems to provide high

quality educational enrichment and career development programs for undeserved low-income teenagers and children” (Wallace, 1999). Nine public libraries from around the country were selected to participate in three-year grants that engaged individual teens in developmentally supportive ways while enhancing services for all teens in the community.<sup>1</sup> With the assistance of technical support provided by the Urban Libraries Council, the grant administrator, each of these nine libraries embarked on an intensive effort of staff training, community analysis, program planning, and implementation; and underlying all of this was a focus on youth development.

Elaine Meyers, the PLPYD project director, synthesized youth development principles to guide the work of the participating libraries. Inspired by Colin Powell’s America’s Promise campaign and incorporating the major research and action agendas of leading youth development organizations, Meyers’s principles were statements of six developmental outcomes necessary for a successful transition from childhood to adulthood:

- Youth contribute to their community.
- Youth feel safe in their environment.
- Youth have meaningful relationships with adults and peers.
- Youth achieve educational success.
- Youth have marketable skills.
- Youth develop personal and social skills (Walter and Meyers, 2003, p. 44).

These six developmental outcomes were reinforced by the operating principles of Programs, Opportunities, and Participation, or POP, and the key mandate to youth librarians to “work with, not for” their teens.

The nine PLPYD libraries used the grant funding to invest in a wide range of paid and volunteer positions for teens such as homework, computer, and general library assistants; members of youth advisory councils; library advocates and outreach workers; and even in Charlotte, North Carolina, as copy and design center employees. All of these programs included training experiences that enabled the teens to improve their job skills, increase their knowledge of technology, develop personal and social skills, and develop new awareness of career and educational opportunities.

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago was hired to conduct an evaluation of PLPYD. Their charge was to document the impact of the initiative on the teens, the library, and the community. They discovered that teens received a number of benefits beyond those they could obtain in school. Teen participants indicated that they learned specific job skills and reported enhanced personal and social development. They also valued the opportunity to develop positive relationships

with adults and peers. Many teens became aware of the library as a positive personal and community resource through the program (Spielberger, Horton, & Michels 2004, pp. 4–6).

The Chapin Hall evaluators took a long, hard look at what it would take for libraries to sustain the youth employment programs after the substantial grant funding was no longer available. They found, not surprisingly, that these programs were costly and that it was challenging for libraries to acquire ongoing public funding for them. They encouraged public libraries that are committed to quality teen programs to build their capacity systematically and to integrate those programs with the overall institutional mission.

The payoff for teens who participated in intensive programs over a substantial period of time was significant. Those teens were more likely to acquire a range of positive developmental outcomes than those who were more superficial or passive library users. Continuity of youth participation as library workers also meant that the teens become better employees who have learned to do their jobs better, thereby supporting the library's services in important ways (Spielberger, Horton, and Michels, 2004).

The Wallace funding for PYPLD ended in 2003, and since then, the nine libraries have worked with varying degrees of success to maintain their commitment to youth development as a core component of their services. The remainder of this article examines the experience of one of those libraries as a case study in youth employment and as a model for positive youth development in a library setting.

### TEEN LEADERSHIP ASSISTANTS AT THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA

Before it became a part of PLPYD, the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) employed a limited number of teens as technology assistants in some of its branch libraries. The teens signed up people to use the public access computers and provided some basic help to patrons new to using this technology. The library also had an after-school program of educational and cultural enrichment for children and teens from six to eighteen years of age called LEAP. Using funding from PLPYD, the library established the paid position of Teen Leadership Assistants (TLAs). TLAs were hired to assist with the LEAP program. In addition, they planned and implemented an annual Youth Empowerment Summit, advised library staff, and received intensive training.

Acknowledging that the library had already laid the groundwork for teen employment before PLPYD, Betsy Orsburn, head of The Office of Public Service Support, says that PLPYD was nevertheless a big eye opener for them. "It gave us the language of youth development," she said. This ability to articulate the program's value was a help in getting another grant from the Carnegie Foundation to expand LEAP to every library and then

ultimately to the secure continuity that results from regular city funding. When Mayor Street mandated that the City fund LEAP out of its regular operating budget, Orsburn reported that he called LEAP the safety net for the children of Philadelphia (B. Orsburn, personal communication, March 12, 2009).

By the spring of 2009, LEAP had survived two budget crises and was considered to be a core service of the Free Library. An After-School Leader (ASL), an adult with at least some college education, supervises the program from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Typically, three Teen Leadership Assistants are on hand, hired from the local high schools. Ten Associate Leaders, college students who have graduated from their former high school positions as TLAs, mentor the TLAs and help out in high-usage branches throughout the city.

The primary focus for children participating in LEAP is getting their homework completed. The ASLs and TLAs are available to sit with the children and coach them through their assignments, much as parents do. They do not tutor, but rather check that the work is finished and suggest strategies for doing a math problem or writing a report. They might help out with a spelling drill. The library has access to the online Tutor.com service, and sometimes the TLAs help the children get started with that or demonstrate other electronic resources. Librarians are called on for more advanced reference inquiries.

When the children have finished their homework, the TLAs might start a Scrabble game or facilitate puzzles and other games. The ASL and TLAs also plan educational and cultural programming for the children. In 2008, for example, an IMLS grant enabled the library to partner with the city museum, a public radio station, and a grass-roots organization called the House of Umoja to create programming that would counter the youth violence that has been a problem in the city. The LEAP staff is also encouraged to develop programming that fosters literacy and cultural enrichment.

Library policy specifies that the TLAs not be used to shelve books or do other routine library clerical work. The only other work that they do outside of LEAP is planning, marketing, and implementing the annual Youth Empowerment Summit. In addition to the ten hours that TLAs work at their assigned library, they are expected to come to the Central Library on Saturday mornings for training of various kinds and to work on the Summit.

TLAs like to explain that the Summit is an event planned BY teens FOR teens. There are now some ASLs who have been involved since the very first Summit in 2000, and their enthusiasm is passed down to the teens. There are elements of the Summit that have become traditional over the years. High schools throughout the city are invited to send a certain number of teens to the Summit, which is held in the Central Library



on a school day in May. Typically, about 300 teens attend. During the day, there are concurrent workshops on topics such as financial management, manga, college financial aid, dream interpretation, and sexual responsibility. There is usually some kind of a teen talent competition such as a poetry slam. Community organizations set up tables to distribute information about their services. An inspirational speaker—often a local author—is invited to speak to the assembled teens at the end of the day. And there are door prizes, solicited by the teens from local businesses. Some lucky teens walk away with laptop computers, iPods, cameras, gift certificates, and other sought-after goods.

Most of the work of planning and organizing the Summit is done by the TLAs working in committees chaired by experienced ASLs. The teens select a theme, design publicity, solicit donations for the door prizes, contact community organizations to participate in the information fair, and decide what workshops to hold. Their pride in what they have accomplished on the day of the event is infectious.

Over the course of a school year, typical TLAs will have worked eight to ten hours a week after school at their neighborhood library. Their major responsibility there is to interact constructively with children and peers who are there to do their homework. They also work with the library ASL to plan some formal programming; they are expected to work more independently in the development of two programs a year. The TLAs will also have been paid to attend trainings on Saturday mornings at the Central Library. These training sessions are sometimes job-related, giving the TLAs customer service skills, for example, or ideas for programs they can use back at their libraries. Other training sessions are designed to enhance the teens' educational achievements; they might attend SAT prep sessions or get some extra tutoring from an ASL with special academic skills. There have been popular training sessions on topics such as avoiding sexual harassment or date rape and dealing with personal finance issues. Finally, the TLAs will have served on a committee responsible for one aspect of the Summit. It is no wonder that when asked about their experience, they will say, "It's more than a job."

Hedra Packman, currently Director of Library Services, has been involved with LEAP since its beginning. I recently asked her if she saw LEAP as primarily an after-school program for school-age children, as a youth development program, or as a teen employment program. Not surprisingly, she said it was all three. "That's its power," she said.

They have to be integrated. You need to give teens meaningful work in order for there to be any positive developmental outcomes. With our funding coming from the Department of Human Services, we are now mandated to provide youth development, but we couldn't do that if it were JUST a youth employment program. We decided a long time



ago that we wouldn't let the kids just shelve books. It has to be more meaningful than that. And the after-school program is run according to child development principles. So it's all incorporated. (H. Packman, personal communication, March 12, 2009)

It is instructive to apply the six positive outcomes for teens to the TLA experience to see just how youth development concepts have been integrated into the program. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from teens are taken from interviews with individuals and a focus group conducted with a total of ten TLAs in December 2008.

*Outcome One: Youth Contribute to Their Community*

The teens understand that they are providing a service to the children in their community. "I feel needed there," one girl said. A boy said, "Sometimes you feel like you're the only positive person in a kid's life." Another TLA was distressed because the library where she worked was on the list of possible closures because of the city's budget shortfall. She was somewhat concerned by the need for a longer commute to a new work site, but she was even more concerned because she knew how much the children in that community relied on LEAP.

TLAs also developed a more sophisticated understanding of the role their library plays in their community. They saw first-hand the people whose lives are touched by the library and get a behind-the-scenes look at the work that librarians do. That first-hand look at the praxis of librarianship was reinforced by an annual optional workshop that many TLAs attended called "The Secret Life of Librarians."

*Outcome Two: Youth Feel Safe in Their Environment*

In 2000, I was investigating the positive developmental outcomes for teens who worked in library homework centers. As part of that research, I talked to teens who worked at LEAP sites. At that time, some of the teens who both lived and worked in neighborhoods ravaged by gang violence acknowledged that the library wasn't 100 percent safe. "But no place is," one street-smart girl insisted.

More recently, the teens have not seemed as concerned about the violence in and around the libraries where they work as they had been eight years earlier. One teen did note that she was grateful that she didn't have to work at night. More importantly, perhaps, they described the library as a psychologically safe place. Many teens describe the library as a desirable social setting. Two TLAs working in the South Philadelphia Branch said that they were the "library crew" and that they had a "little family" there at the library. Another girl described the group of teens receiving some extra training through a grant from the William Penn Foundation in 2008–9 as being a cohesive, close-knit group. One girl gushed about the library where she worked, "I make it sound like Candyland."

Having a defined role as a TLA seemed to give the teens a positive identity that contributed to their sense of security and safety that extended beyond the walls of the library. "I'm more confident now," one shy girl said. In a survey taken in 2006, one boy even said he "walked with pride" because he worked in the library.

*Outcome Three: Youth Have Meaningful Relationships with Adults and Peers*

Many of the teens described their supervisors in positive terms. A typical comment was: "They're flexible with us. They understand we're in school." Another teen got a lot of nods from the other focus group participants when she said, "They care about our personal problems."

As noted previously, the teens form solid bonds with the other TLAs at their work site. These relationships are especially significant for the TLAs who are home-schooled. These teens talked about the pleasure of interacting with other young people on the job. The library administrators responsible for the program have also noted that the Saturday trainings and Youth Empowerment Summit brought the TLAs together with teens from all parts of the city. Like many urban areas, Philadelphia is quite segregated racially, and it is not unusual for teens to stay close to their local neighborhoods and to interact primarily with people from their own racial or ethnic group. LEAP forces them out of this geographical isolation and into more integrated and heterogeneous social situations.

The structure of LEAP facilitates both formal and informal mentoring across generational lines. The TLAs were role models and informal mentors to the younger children in the library while the ASLs, college students who have come up through the TLA ranks, were mentors to the teens. Scholars have noted that this kind of cross-age peer mentoring produces benefits for both parties (Karcher, 2005). Peer mentoring usually refers to a sustained, program-based relationship in which the older peer helps guide the younger person's development in some area. Typically, the older teen is someone the mentee can look up to, admire, and aspire to emulate. The mentees thus benefit from having role models they can actually observe and learn from first-hand while the mentors benefit from being placed in a position of responsibility and influence.

*Outcome Four: Youth Achieve Educational Success*

In the 2002 study, some teens reported doing better in school just because they were exposed to more information resources at the library. And in 2008, one teen who had a second job at Dunkin' Donuts said that the library job was a lot better. "Here you actually learn something," she said. In the 2008 focus groups, however, the most significant educational benefit reported by the teens was the SAT preparation they had received as part of their Saturday training. None of the ten teens in this sample group had access to SAT preparation or adequate college counseling at their school or through their homeschooling resources. At least two teens were sure

that their SAT scores were higher than they otherwise would have been without the extra tutoring.

*Outcome Five: Youth Have Marketable Skills*

While some TLAs took advantage of training in areas such as customer service or computer applications, it is unlikely that many of the specific job skills that the TLAs use in working with children after-school will transfer to other kinds of employment. However, they were acquiring some critical experiences that will transfer to any other job: learning to be on time, working in a group, appropriate worksite behavior and dress. They were aware that the work they do is important. A boy reported, "I like working on a professional level." One of the girls said, "It helps you grow up. You're working in the real world."

The teens are also aware that working at the library is a good résumé builder. It gives them work experience that they can cite in other job applications. Knowing that their supervisors may be called on to provide references for them later on, they tried to be good employees.

*Outcome Six: Youth Develop Personal and Social Skills*

The TLAs knew that they were growing both personally and socially. One of the teens who was homeschooled said, "It's helped me socially; I used to be more of an introvert." Another girl who attended a very small Christian school said, "I was sheltered, and that was all I knew. Now I can talk to people, all kinds of people." The library setting seemed to provide a safe place for the teens to expand their social interactions from the secure and known network of family and friends to a larger group of adults, peers, and children. One girl described being frustrated at times when there were too many children in the library for her to handle on a one-to-one basis or when a child was lazy or didn't seem to want to settle down. "But it's fun when they *get* it," she said.

Over the nine years that I have been observing LEAP, I have heard many testimonials from the teens about the value of their work experience. For some, the paycheck itself was significant. Some of these young people contribute their wages to help maintain their families. For others, there is considerable status in working for the city. Unlike a job at a fast food outlet or mini-mall shop, a "city job" carries with it a certain prestige, particularly for low-income residents. In addition, almost all of the teens I have talked with articulated some of the developmental outcomes outlined here. As one girl told me recently, "It's more than a job."

As noted earlier, the library administrators responsible for the overall management of LEAP also saw the Teen Leadership Assistant position as "more than a job." They acknowledged that the teens played an important role in implementing the LEAP after-school programs throughout the city. As near-peers to the children who took advantage of the LEAP services,

they were good role models for the younger students. As members of the community that the library serves, they also possessed a lot of useful local knowledge. They helped to trace complicated family relationships and shed light on issues of concern.

Administrators at the Free Library of Philadelphia have many good reasons for supporting LEAP and the work of the TLAS. As noted previously, it generates strong political support. In a city where youth violence is a critical problem, LEAP delivers two positive programs: an after-school drop-in service for school children with strong educational and cultural components and good jobs for teens in all parts of the city. In November 2008, the Mayor and City Librarian announced the imminent closing of eleven branch libraries due to the city's budget crisis, but the LEAP program has not been defunded.

In addition to fueling the after-school programs for children and generating political support for the library, the TLAs were part of an ongoing effort by the library to recruit diverse Philadelphians to the library profession. Since 2003, the Free Library has received funding from IMLS for various projects to "grow their own" librarians. These projects have primarily provided tuition support for library employees to complete their Bachelors' degrees and then go on to a graduate program for an MLIS degree. In addition, however, there has been some funding for TLA training that informs the teens about careers in librarianship. These half-day workshops on "the secret life of librarians" give the teens basic information about career opportunities, educational requirements, and emerging issues in the praxis of librarianship. In a culminating activity, the teens work in teams to design their dream library.

For most of the TLAS, these introductory workshops provided their first insights into libraries as a place to launch a career. Most were surprised to learn that a graduate degree is required to be a librarian. Many were surprised by the range of jobs and employment settings that were available to librarians. Salaries received a range of responses. Those teens hoping to make it big as pro basketball players or rap stars were scornful, but most were impressed with the earning possibilities.

At the close of the "secret life" workshops, teens were asked to fill out two forms. One was headed: "Three reasons I might decide to become a librarian." The other was headed: "Three reasons I would NOT choose to become a librarian." Their responses were idiosyncratic, of course, but some patterns have emerged. Among the consistent reasons these urban teens would choose not to be librarians: too boring, low pay, interested in another career, and not suited to the work. The teens who felt they were not suited to the work of librarianship cited lack of patience, a dislike of reading, and a lack of passion as reasons for their unsuitability.

Reasons for thinking positively about a career in librarianship were more varied than the negative responses. The most common reason given was a

desire to serve the community or to help people. Interestingly, given that low pay was cited as a negative factor for some teens, others found the pay scale to be attractive. Some teens thought the work sounded easy; others welcomed the opportunity to work with children. Many were drawn to the profession because they like books and reading. One TLA, almost certainly a girl, wrote, "Because I luvvvv books! Books are amazing! They can open the world."

We cannot predict how many of the TLAs who are now juniors and seniors in high school will actually go on to become librarians. Probably not many. However, the seeds of praxis have been sown. In 2008, the first former TLA received her MLIS degree from the University of Pittsburgh and began work as a professional librarian. There will certainly be more to follow her.

Some branch supervisors also made efforts to mentor the TLAs who worked for them and to reveal some of the behind-the-scenes aspects of library work. The outcomes of workshop attendance and eight or nine months of working in a library setting have been captured in pre- and post-tests given in 2006–7 and 2007–8. In both years, teens were asked at the beginning and the end of the school year (and their employment term) to fill out a form listing five duties and responsibilities of librarians. The forms were graded and sorted into three categories:

- Library Super Stars—able to name five duties, responsibilities, or characteristics of librarians
- Library Apprentices—able to name three or four duties, responsibilities, or characteristics of librarians
- Library Novices—able to name fewer than three duties, responsibilities, or characteristics of librarians

In each year, students' ability to correctly identify the work of professional librarians improved during their term of employment. In 2007–8, the category of Library Super Stars increased from 22 percent to 32 percent of the teens taking the test. The percentage of Library Apprentices actually decreased from 53 percent to 50 percent, probably because some TLAS now qualified as Super Stars. Happily, the percentage of Library Novices decreased from 25 percent to 18 percent. Over all, at the end of a school year, more than 80 percent can correctly identify at least three duties and responsibilities of a professional librarian.

The Library Super Stars seemed to be aware of the range of tasks performed by librarians: public service, supervision, branch management, and community outreach. All of these young people were aware that librarians help people find books or information, answer questions, and help children in special ways such as storytelling. Many seemed to understand the special mission of the public library, indicated by comments such as these, none of which have been edited for spelling or grammar:

"Entertaining the children by setting up events, charities, etc. Children are very well the future."

"Making the library a habitat for readers and explorers."

"Keep the library remaining peaceful."

The Library Super Stars also identified some of those special personal qualities that a librarian should possess:

"A librarian should be a mother/father figure to kids who come to the library. Librarians should also be good examples to society."

"A librarian should be jolly at all times. There is nothing a librarian does not know about books."

A few TLAs participating in the Spring 2008 posttest even used some technical jargon in their responses: outreach, collection development, weeding. They were clearly paying attention during the year.

The Library Apprentices generally understood the public service, managerial, or supervisory aspects of a librarian's job. Many were specific about the librarian's supervisory responsibilities relative to the TLAs:

"To tell the TLAs what is needed of them."

"Give TLA something to do when they don't have anything to do."

Like the Library Super Stars, the Library Apprentices had some ideas about what personal qualities were desirable in a librarian:

"Librarians should know how to talk to people in a respectable way."

"Be paytion."

"Be a friend."

Where the Library Apprentices differed most from the Library Super Stars was their inability to distinguish between professional and clerical duties. All of the teens in this category included at least one clerical task in their list of five duties and responsibilities of librarians. They seemed to know what goes on in libraries, but they still did not have a firm appreciation of the different job classifications of the people working there.

The Library Novices, teens who were able to identify fewer than three duties and responsibilities of librarians, fell into several subsets. Many simply responded with a list of TLA duties. Some listed only clerical tasks. Others gave vague responses that could apply to any job classification:

"A librarian keeps the library quiet."

"Assist patrons."

The Library Novices had a very limited understanding of the range of activities implemented at the public library and even less understanding of the particular role of the librarian. Their answers tended to be terse; they lacked the rich imagery and vocabulary found in the responses of their fellow TLAs. It is possible that they simply lacked the literacy skills of

their fellow teen workers and either did not understand the instructions or did not know how to communicate what they knew.

Even those teens who were least obviously socialized into the culture of librarianship came away from their TLA experience with an enhanced appreciation for the ways in which their local public library contributes to their community. They saw first-hand that the library is a place where children and teens, in particular, are welcomed and helped with school work. They saw with their own eyes that the library is more than a repository for books.

## DISCUSSION

Many public libraries hire teenagers to do their most routine tasks, using them primarily to reshelve books. The work is not stimulating. It is tiring and often dirty. It lacks variety. It lacks any kind of sanctioned social interaction. In fact, most supervisors caution their pages not to answer any questions they may be asked by patrons and to tell their friends not to visit them while they're working. Teens doing this kind of low-level library work receive a paycheck and an introduction to the world of work, with its hierarchy, rules, regulations, and cultural norms. Rarely, however, do these teens get an understanding of how their work helps the library serve its community. Rarely do these teens feel that they have accomplished something significant at the end of their workday. And only occasionally do they have an opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with adults who work in the library. Any positive youth development outcomes are secondary benefits and certainly not intentional.

By infusing the teen employment program with principles of youth development, the administrators of LEAP have ensured that the TLAs get benefits beyond their paychecks. The TLAS, who only received minimum wage salaries, articulated some of those less tangible rewards. Here are a few testimonials from the students themselves.

Meghan, a senior in high school, had never taken the bus before she started coming to the Center City for Saturday trainings. She had never been to any of the world-famous Parkway museums until she participated in a TLA field trip to the Franklin Institute. "I'm going to the Community College of Philadelphia in the fall," she said. "I can do it now that I know how to take the bus there."

Jasmine was a shy African American sophomore. "I don't like to put myself out there," she said. "With LEAP I have to speak up and participate. It's good for me."

Teddy was the son of Chinese immigrants and the only member of his family to have a job. "I know I don't always meet their expectations," he explains. "They want top-notch, and I can't always be top-notch. But they are proud that I'm working for the library, and that makes me feel better."



Tahnica was home-schooled. "I know the SAT prep helped me," she said. "Otherwise, I'd just be sitting in front of the computer, doing those drills over and over."

Lisa, a Vietnamese American girl who worked at Dunkin Donuts as well as the library, found that she has gained a lot of self-knowledge. "I know myself a little better, what I can handle and what I can't. I can work under pressure."

Zoey found the library to be a haven and a channel for her boundless energy. "When my mom and I came back to Philadelphia from Italy, I didn't know anybody. I could come to the library and feel secure with the good smell of books. Now the job gives me nice people to talk to and interesting things to do."

John was a very focused junior at one of the Catholic high schools. He has a supportive family and kept busy with church and school activities. But the library experience added another positive line to his résumé. "It looks really good on college applications," he says.

Trish, a free spirit who wrote poetry and created manga in her free time, acknowledged that the library job gave her some grounding in reality. "It makes me more mature," she admits.

William Finnegan (1998) wrote about the cold new world that American teenagers experienced as they struggled to grow up in a country with fewer prospects than their parents had. Those prospects have arguably shrunk even more in the decade since Finnegan explored the issue. Teens and their parents need more community supports at a time when those very supports are being eroded by budget shortfalls. The public library, located in nearly every neighborhood, is particularly well-situated to shore up that network of community supports.

Policy-makers who focus on teens have been aware for some time of the potential of neighborhood organizations in the lives of teens. Through their involvement with local agencies, even the most at-risk inner-city teens find ways to operationalize their desires for a better life and a legitimate role in society (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). Public libraries that intentionally create supports and opportunities by infusing youth development principles into their approach to young adult services can be significant partners in teens' lives. Yohalem and Pittman (2003) enumerate the kinds of resources that public libraries can offer to young people in their out-of-school time hours:

- Libraries are an ideal first work place and a gateway to a respected profession.
- Libraries can be a forum where teens can identify community issues they care about and get the knowledge and skills they need to act on them.
- Libraries are ideal hubs for formal and informal learning.

Those supports and opportunities for positive youth development can be best implemented through the creation of the kind of teen job programs described here. The developmental outcomes provided by LEAP to its TLAs have been well-documented. There is, moreover, a ripple effect that extends to other teens. Many Philadelphia teens volunteer at their local libraries before they are placed on the payroll. Teens also look to the public library as a location for their mandatory community service. The library builds on its practice with paid teen jobs in designing positive volunteer experiences. Theresa Ramos, the Free Library Foundation employee who has been responsible for both writing and implementing aspects of the LEAP program that have been grant funded, also sees what she called a scaffolding effect. "Younger kids look up to the TLAs and the TLAs look up to the Associate Leaders. You've got all of these role models providing aspirational goals" (T. Ramos, personal communication, March 12, 2009).

The benefits for teens from participating in a well-designed youth job program are obvious. What does the library get out of it? Ginnie Cooper, Director of the Washington, D.C., Public Library, recently implemented a teen employment program based on the Free Library TLA model. At a symposium on Community Based Librarianship held in Philadelphia in May of 2009, she explained one immediate benefit. "When teens come into the library, they see other teens there, and they know that they're welcome." Supervisors at the Free Library sometimes describe the TLAs as their eyes and ears into the community. They know the names of most of the local children and can usually identify a potential troublemaker, as well as his brothers, sisters, and parents. They may be the only library employees who actually live in the community and provide important links to its informal networks.

The LEAP program, with its direct service to children in after-school hours and its opportunities for youth employment, has also given the Free Library significant political capital. As noted earlier, elected officials protect LEAP's funding and sing its praises.

The Forum for Youth Investment maintains that communities as a whole benefit when teens are nurtured appropriately. Obviously, teens who are able to achieve positive developmental outcomes are less likely to act out in negative ways. There is also reason to believe that they actually give back tangible benefits to their communities. Certainly the TLAs are a source of support to the children and other teens who participate in LEAP. It is possible that they will also find other ways to leverage the leadership and interpersonal skills they have acquired through their experiences at the library.

I have painted a very rosy picture of LEAP and its Teen Leadership Assistants. Is there any downside? As the program has grown, it has become impossible for the administrators who coordinate the program cen-

trally to keep an eye on every teen. They must rely on the branch staff to nurture their young employees, and not every library supervisor feels completely comfortable with the roles of supervisor and mentor to teens. As one library manager told me after a training session on mentoring, "It's easy for you. You *like* teens." However, many library managers have grown to love this aspect of their job. Theresa Ramos described one librarian who drove a local teen to Central Library to put in her application (T. Ramos, personal communication, March 12, 2009). Most TLAs describe their branch supervisors in glowing terms.

Unpredictability of funding for the program is another administrative difficulty. The current LEAP program at the Free Library is financed through a patchwork of funding sources, both private and public. Most recently the city funding for the TLAs has been moved from the library to a pass-through account with the Department of Human Services, creating additional paperwork for the library and some more restrictive eligibility requirements for the teens. It takes considerable administrative overhead to manage the various funding sources and to generate new revenue streams for the service.

Interestingly, the Free Library of Philadelphia has a relatively underdeveloped formal program of service to teens. The Central Library has a well-established teen author program, and some branches have assigned the responsibility of teen services to one of their reference libraries. Teen Outreach Specialists operate from the library's regional offices to coordinate programming and outreach, primarily through the schools. The TLA component of LEAP, however, is the single most visible effort by the library to serve teens. The administration might want to consider integrating LEAP more closely into its overall service to teens.

## CONCLUSION

Young adult library services have evolved from a focus on reading promotion to a more holistic approach based on the principles of positive youth development. Most public libraries use participation through mechanisms such as teen advisory boards as their primary means of implementing youth development practices. While many of these same libraries hire teens, little thought is given to incorporating those same youth development principles into their teen employment offerings. This article argued that libraries can and should think about creating supports and opportunities for youth development through more intentional creation of teen jobs and by integrating those employment opportunities into their vision of young adult services. A small investment today in teens like Jincy, Meghan, Teddy, Zoey, Jasmine, Gennady, and Eric will reap both short-term and long-term rewards.

## NOTE

1. The nine PLPYD libraries were Brooklyn Public Library (Brooklyn, NY), Enoch Pratt Free Library (Baltimore, MD), Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (Charlotte, NC), Fort Bend County Libraries (Richmond, TX), King County Library System (Issaquah, WA), Oakland Public Library (Oakland, CA), Free Library of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA), Tucson-Pima Public Library (Tucson, AZ), and Washoe County Library System (Reno, NV).

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